

# Pacific Air Forces' Power Projection

Sustaining Peace, Prosperity, and Freedom

Lt Col David A. Williamson, USAF

*No single core mission offers only one of the three effects of airpower—Global Vigilance, Global Reach, or Global Power—because all five core missions are necessary to provide the integrated global airpower effects that only the Air Force can supply. And each Airman, regardless of their mission-specific specialty, plays a critical role in delivering these effects. For example, a remotely piloted aircraft pilot does not just supply Global Vigilance, a boom operator on a tanker does not just bring Global Reach, and a navigator on a bomber does not just dispense Global Power. Using their innovative natures, these Airmen play a part in providing all three, just as all Airmen do.*

—Global Vigilance, Global Reach, Global Power for America

*MacArthur's campaign in the Southwest Pacific would not have been possible without air power. General George C. Kenney, MacArthur's airman, proved instrumental to the Allied victory.*

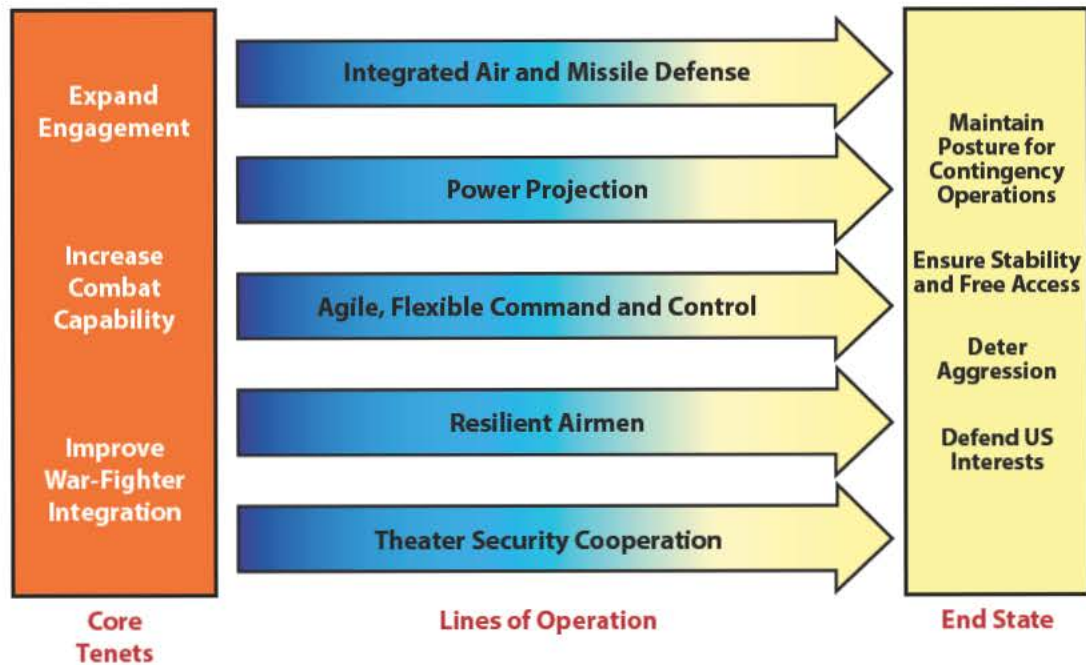
—Thomas E. Griffith Jr.

Just as Gen George C. Kenney tenaciously focused the airpower resources under his command to support General MacArthur's historic campaign to liberate the Pacific theater, so does today's Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) concentrate on supporting the broader theater objectives of the commander, United States Pacific Command

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(CDRUSPACOM). To enhance this goal, PACAF categorizes its activities and operations into five distinct lines of operation (LOO): theater security cooperation, integrated air and missile defense, agile and flexible command and control (C2), resilient Airmen, and power projection (see the figure below). This article examines the power projection LOO.



**Figure. PACAF strategy construct.** (Adapted from "PACAF Strategy," Pacific Air Forces, accessed 20 November 2014, <http://www.pacaf.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-130927-079.pdf>.)

Power projection is PACAF's application of control and influence at a distant point from the source of that power. As the essence of airpower, projection consists of three primary elements: vigilance, reach, and power. This article demonstrates how PACAF's power projection LOO supports the PACOM theater. It introduces unique characteristics of the Pacific theater and then describes how vigilance, reach, and power contribute to the CDRUSPACOM's ability to establish the necessary



conditions for securing peace, expanding freedom, and sustaining prosperity through the application of air and cyber power.

PACOM's area of responsibility (AOR) is unique among those of the six geographic combatant commands. The Pacific AOR spans 16 time zones and covers 100 million square miles—52 percent of the earth's surface. The geographic area and distances involved affect every conversation, circumstance, and requirement for the application and projection of air, sea, and land power. The Pacific region enjoys a rich history and unique elements of cultural diversity as home to half of the world's population and more than 3,000 languages.<sup>1</sup> Including the United States, the Pacific AOR encompasses 36 nations, all of which desire advancement of their own specific interests. Thus, the great distances, vast areas, history, cultural diversity, and various political equities combine to establish a unique set of regional challenges. Yet, political and cultural issues form only part of the equation.

The Pacific region is greatly affected by a variety of threats, the most pervasive of which are weather and seismic events such as volcanic eruption, earthquakes, and subsequent tsunamis. These natural occurrences transcend cultural barriers and require energetic humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) teamwork to minimize loss of life and property. Response to such disaster entails more than the sum of juggling logistics challenges and bridging language barriers. Done properly, it is a life-saving triumph spurred by a cooperative, cross-cultural partnership between affected Pacific nations and support from PACOM-assigned (and -attached) forces, C2, and vigilance across all fronts. In support of HADR circumstances, PACAF projects a type of power through long-range aircraft that conduct disaster assessment, evacuation, and airlift of supplies.

Power projection is unique among PACAF LOOs because of the nature of military combat power. In the Clausewitzian lexicon, power projection simply extends politics through military means. Thus, there are conceptual and political limits to its scope, depth, visibility, and intensity. Limitations occur when increases in the type or frequency of ac-

tivity negatively affect the theater, even if resources and opportunities remain available. This situation is less likely with regard to most other PACAF LOOs. For example, the theater security cooperation LOO is greatly influenced by manpower or scheduling availability but not by the idea that increased interaction with partner nations runs counter to US interests in the Pacific theater.

## Vigilance

PACAF utilizes air, cyber, and space-based capabilities to detect, evaluate, measure, monitor, communicate, protect, and coordinate its responses to any crisis or hazard. These capabilities embody the first element of PACAF power projection—vigilance. In November 2013, super-typhoon Haiyan gained strength and struck the Philippines with mind-boggling sustained winds in excess of 190 miles per hour—one of the strongest recorded storms to make landfall. PACAF's crisis-action planning teams tracked the storm and diligently monitored the emerging needs of the Philippine government, United States Agency for International Development, and PACOM's joint task force established to direct the command's relief efforts for Operation Damayan. PACAF directed RQ-4 high-altitude sensors to assist with evaluating the extent of the damage. In this example, the vigilance provided by PACAF-assigned (and -attached) intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets determined where Philippine relief resources were needed most and where support from air transport would be necessary. PACAF also projected power through the deployment of C2 elements, leadership, and aerial-port opening capabilities. This action included deployment of a joint force air component command element and portions of the 36th Contingency Response Group, which deployed to manage airfield operations and sustain responsiveness to the emerging situation.

Another notable example was PACAF's support of HADR operations in response to the Japanese earthquake and tsunami in 2011. The Airmen operating the RQ-4 Global Hawk determined damage levels and identified routes that remained passable.<sup>2</sup> If history is any indicator,



the likelihood of needing a real-world response with HADR currently exceeds the probability of a major regional conflict. Unfortunately, PACAF must exercise vigilance for more than just natural disasters.

PACAF's ISR missions also maintain vigilance by sustaining awareness of the activities and capabilities of potential military threats. Examples of this type of power projection include the management and execution of ISR missions to collect typical components of intelligence, such as images or signals. PACOM prioritizes potential collection targets and directs mission execution based on theater and national priorities. PACAF sustains the ability to collect this data and ensures that the processing, exploitation, and dissemination of the information remain responsive and robust, thus making actionable intelligence available to senior political and military leaders and allowing them to make effective decisions. PACAF's power projection LOO ensures that timely, effective airborne sensors are present and positioned in international airspace to provide necessary domain awareness.

### *Vigilance in Contested Areas*

Thucydides, the ancient Greek historian, recorded the comments of a leadership delegation from a strong power relating to its relatively less powerful neighbor. The members observed that an outcome that is morally or diplomatically "right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, this ancient insight still holds true. Potential adversaries threaten the peace and prosperity of the Pacific region through hostile, dangerous, and acquisitive military activity within contested areas. Some nations appear willing to employ their relative might to exploit and threaten their neighbors. Obvious examples include the threat to use, test, acquire, and export dangerous weapons, even while their populations suffer—a prospect that necessitates vigilant and persistent monitoring through space, cyber, and airborne means.

PACAF-assigned and -controlled ISR aircraft exemplify the power projection LOO by flying missions through international airspace at great distances from the continental United States. PACAF relies on the unique capabilities of both manned and remotely piloted reconnaissance platforms to carry out these missions. The very high operating altitude of the RQ-4, a long-duration remotely piloted aircraft, offers extraordinary persistence and a broad area of collection. This platform's ability to fly from multiple Pacific island bases also affords PACAF great flexibility, enabling reconnaissance operations at the farthest reaches of the AOR on a single mission. Together with the RQ-4, manned surveillance platforms—including the U-2, E-3, RC-135 Rivet Joint, E-8C Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System, and the US Navy's P-3 and P-8—supply critical information and awareness about what occurs within the theater.

### *International Norms and Freedom of Navigation*

Adherence to international norms and freedom of navigation is critical to sustaining vigilance as well as optimizing the economic viability of the Pacific AOR; consequently, it is vital to the region. PACAF aircrews support and demonstrate compliance with international aviation norms and behavior during the conduct of their missions—especially as it pertains to the routine, legal, and safe operation of aircraft in international airspace. They exemplify the high bar of aviation professionalism by honoring International Civil Aviation Organization standards and demonstrating respect for the sovereign territorial airspace of our Pacific and global neighbors. PACAF (as well as the Pacific Fleet) ensures that freedom of navigation is sustained through routine exercise and maintenance of international standards of aviation safety and discipline.

### *Cyber Vigilance*

PACAF's vigilance in the contested cyber domain is vital to assuring informational and decisional superiority. It enables and sustains efficient



operations by protecting the information and decision support tools inherent in cyber-based systems. The attentiveness of PACAF's cyber operations not only protects the information systems, C2, and data vital to theater power-projection activities but also assures their reliability and availability to authorized users.

## Reach

The second key element of PACAF power projection is embodied in PACAF's management, execution, and support of airlift and air-refueling missions. PACAF-based C-130, C-17, and KC-135 aircraft move forces around the theater in support of both PACAF's and PACOM's objectives and strategy. The PACAF air mobility team, in concert with US Transportation Command, guarantees that airlift functions smoothly throughout the theater. Airlift is critical to the movement of everything from combat forces, to equipment, to life-saving and -sustaining medical supplies for relief operations. It also allows specially trained medical teams to provide immediate aeromedical evacuation from remote PACAF locations.

The HADR activities of Operation Damayan in the Philippines serve as an excellent example of the reach of power projection in PACOM's AOR. C-130s from the 374th Airlift Wing supported storm-ravaged areas and provided initial tactical airlift to both the Philippine government and Joint Task Force 505, established to lead PACOM's relief effort in the Philippines. As work progressed and airfield conditions improved, larger aircraft such as the C-17 conducted operations in areas affected by the storm.

Alaska Air National Guard C-17 crew members from the 249th Airlift Squadron stationed at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, transported a forklift to assist with the unloading of supplies to areas hardest hit by the storm. However, their mission changed rapidly when they were redirected to conduct emergency airlift. The crew transported 489 victims of the Philippine typhoon to safer areas by loading them in



rows of 40 on the floor of the C-17 and securing them with cargo straps fastened across their laps.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, crew members relied on their night vision goggles and low-light procedures to mitigate the storm's damage to local navigation equipment. The responsiveness of PACAF airlift to these otherwise inaccessible areas demonstrates the projection of power through airlift's extensive and flexible reach.

PACAF's reach also included deployment of the 36th Contingency Response Group to the Philippines to prepare damaged airfields in hard-hit areas for the influx of supplies and the relocation of people in need of shelter. Working in partnership with airlift, and ultimately led by the Philippine government, PACOM airpower evacuated over 6,000 people and delivered 1.5 million pounds of supplies and cargo.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, aeromedical evacuation exemplifies PACAF's power projection. In addition to conducting preplanned missions, aeromedical-alert aircraft, crews, and support personnel stand ready to respond to medical emergencies. The PACAF aeromedical team is equipped for rapid transport of patients to the appropriate level of care. This type of power projection enables the men and women of the PACOM joint force to accomplish their mission throughout the theater, making medical care available even in remote areas. In April 2013, for instance, a newborn baby in Thailand required life-saving transport to medical facilities in San Diego. The 613th Aeromedical Evacuation Team, along with the 735th Air Mobility Squadron, sprang into action and enabled reassignment of a C-17 for this medical mission, ultimately saving the life of the three-day-old infant. Such responsive care underpins every service member's ability to focus on his or her duties.

## Power

This final element is typically the first consideration in discussions about power projection since the latter ultimately involves the ability to effectively conduct combat operations whenever and wherever called upon. As air component to the CDRUSPACOM, PACAF readies

air combat operations for execution throughout PACOM's AOR, including its subunified command—United States Forces Korea. As such, PACAF is home to the F-22, F-15C, A-10, and F-16. The F-35, the newest fifth-generation fighter aircraft, is expected to make PACAF its home in advance of other theaters. This platform will accompany the F-22 to form the world's finest, most formidable team of fifth-generation fighters.

The United States' Pacific theater rebalance policy has increased emphasis on and awareness of the growing importance of the region. It is also cognizant of growing regional threats to peace and prosperity, accompanied by provocative, acquisitive, and dangerous behaviors. This situation calls for greater reliance upon continuous bomber presence (CBP) and the theater security package (TSP).

### *Continuous Bomber Presence*

In recent years, CBP—currently based at Andersen AFB, Guam—has predominantly been filled by B-52 aircraft from Air Force Global Strike Command. The B-52 is ideally suited for the power projection mission because of its massive payload and combat range. From Andersen AFB, CBP bombers can deliver combat power to any area of conflict within the Pacific AOR. An extremely flexible force, CBP routinely operates at long durations and distances from Andersen as it conducts training missions to various locations around the theater. The bombers also demonstrate the flexibility to relocate and disperse throughout the region. Aircraft based at Andersen do not need to recover to that same location.

CBP routinely conducts combat training sorties, supports subject-matter-expert exchange programs, and executes aviation exercises with partner nations throughout the Pacific. Its crews hone their navigation skills; air refueling; mission planning; and combat tactics, techniques, and procedures for antiaccess/area-denial scenarios with forces from the Pacific Fleet. These efforts also support the Air-Sea Battle concept and represent an intense focus area for PACOM and the Department of Defense.



PACAF-directed missions launched from the continental United States offer another sterling example of the flexible, responsive nature of PACAF power projection. B-52, B-2, and B-1 bomber crews and maintainers routinely deploy to PACOM and refine their skills in loading, maintaining, and employing an exhaustive array of weapons. Their arsenal includes Global Positioning System-aided, laser-guided stand-off weapons; weapons designed to destroy deeply buried targets; aerial-delivered maritime weapons; and strategic weapons. Recently, B-2 crews flew routine deployments and training missions to Hawaii and the Republic of Korea, further demonstrating that Air Force Global Strike Command bombers are ready and able to support power projection missions whenever and wherever called upon.

Long-range CBP and global power missions contribute a reassuring message to the Pacific theater that PACOM will not tolerate undue military aggression or restrictions to lawful transit of aircraft through international airspace. The recent declaration by the People's Republic of China (PRC) of an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea is an obvious example of an attempt to hamper free transit through international airspace. Former US secretary of defense Chuck Hagel accurately described the PRC's behavior as "a destabilising attempt to alter the status quo in the region." Secretary Hagel continued to reaffirm that America's position concerning the mutual defense treaty with Japan "applies to the Senkaku Islands." Japan also delivered a "high-level protest."<sup>6</sup> PACAF's power projection responded to the PRC ADIZ by ensuring that the next day's CBP mission flew as planned through the East China Sea (and PRC ADIZ), a single day after China claimed to have established it. PACAF will freely enjoy, utilize, and exercise international airspace on behalf of the United States, its partners within the region, USPACOM, and fellow component forces throughout the region, regardless of why the claim is made.



### *Theater Security Package*

TSP—the planned, routine flow of fighter forces into the PACOM AOR—also supports PACAF. These forces enhance PACAF's ability to respond immediately to acquisitive or provocative actions of potential adversaries. TSP's forward presence and combat posture also decrease the logistics burden and timeline needed to move forces forward in the Pacific theater. The security package's rotations into the theater also season and enhance theater awareness of non-PACAF units and enable training-integration opportunities between PACAF and TSP units. Take, for example, the recent posturing of F-22 TSP forces from Langley AFB, Virginia, at Kadena AB, Japan. This deployment provided an extremely visible projection of combat power that enabled the honing of integration tactics and training between visiting F-22s and PACAF forces.

Along with PACAF-assigned forces, CBP and TSP units also expand cooperation and engagement with partner nations in the Pacific and improve war-fighter integration. In 2013 PACAF invited the lethal air-to-air combat capabilities of 10 New Orleans F-15Cs from the Louisiana Air National Guard to conduct multilateral training engagements during Cope Tiger 2013—a power projection journey of more than 15,000 miles from home. These aircraft were accompanied by total-force professionals of the Louisiana Air National Guard, exemplifying the projection of power through professional maintenance, air combat training, exchanges of subject-matter experts, and flight discipline. As a final example, during multilateral exercise RIMPAC 2014, the 391st Fighter Squadron, a TSP unit, was temporarily sent to Joint Base Pearl Harbor–Hickam to posture forces, conduct engagements with allies, and practice Air-Sea Battle tactics.

### *Rapid Raptor*

The Rapid Raptor concept offers a final instance of the “power” element of power projection. The concept exploits the enormous capabilities of the C-17 and F-22 aircraft to conduct rapid, lean, and tailored

movements of F-22 combat power throughout the theater, with minimal notice and footprint. Rapid Raptor enables dramatic flexibility and allows any runway in the Pacific to become a launching point for F-22 training and combat operations. This feature is especially useful in an antiaccess/area-denial environment or during threats by medium- and long-range missiles.<sup>7</sup> Still in development, Rapid Raptor demands thoughtful logistical planning that will enable multiple, simultaneous combat scenarios and locations.

In light of the challenges, threats, and hazards of the vast Pacific AOR, airpower investment and recapitalization must continue to develop and sustain PACAF's ability to provide the CDRUSPACOM with power projection capabilities. Projects such as the Rapid Raptor, KC-46, F-35, and long-range-strike bomber all represent critical emerging capabilities that the PACOM AOR must have to respond to today's crises and tomorrow's conflicts.

## Conclusion

During his support of General MacArthur, Gen George C. Kenney learned that the concept of projecting airpower may be very simple but that its execution can prove quite challenging. Today's PACAF power projection LOO is also challenged as it directly and intentionally applies air and cyber power to influence the Pacific theater on behalf of the CDRUSPACOM. Through the element of PACAF's vigilance, surveillance platforms maximize visible forward presence and collect required intelligence. PACAF's reach allows for the forward movement of equipment, personnel, and capabilities throughout the region—whether to facilitate HADR or to move combat units to a distant location and then quickly move them again. PACAF's power, the final element of power projection, is exemplified in the movement, training, and operations of combat aircraft throughout the PACOM AOR. By means of the combined efforts of PACAF-assigned TSP, CBP, and ISR forces, PACAF ensures that the CDRUSPACOM can respond to any crisis facing the PACOM AOR. The projection of air and cyber power inten-



tionally influences the theater to assure that the Pacific AOR is able to sustain the necessary conditions for peace, expanded freedom, and sustained prosperity. ★

## Notes

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